

MOTOR COORDINATION ACTIVITIES: GAIT TRAINING

HEAVY HANDS



Arm swings are important to gait. They add rhythm, flow, lift, and momentum. Unfortunately, arm swings often diminish or disappear as people age. Reasons for this include loss of strength, loss of balance confidence, and the use of walkers or canes. If hands are heavy, they're easier to swing. This activity uses rolled-up magazines to make hands heavy and facilitate arm swings. Old magazines are in almost anyone's budget, which makes this activity doable for any group.

Benefits »

- Facilitates arm swings.
- Uses proprioceptive tools.
- Uses inexpensive props that are easy to find.

Set It Up »

You'll need two magazines per person, one for each hand. They should be heavy enough that participants can feel the effect while doing arm swings (National Geographic or other glossy print magazines work best because they are heavier). Roll the magazines lengthwise. There's really no need to tape them into a roll. Half-pound or one-pound (0.2 or 0.5 kilograms) weights can also be used.

How to Do It »

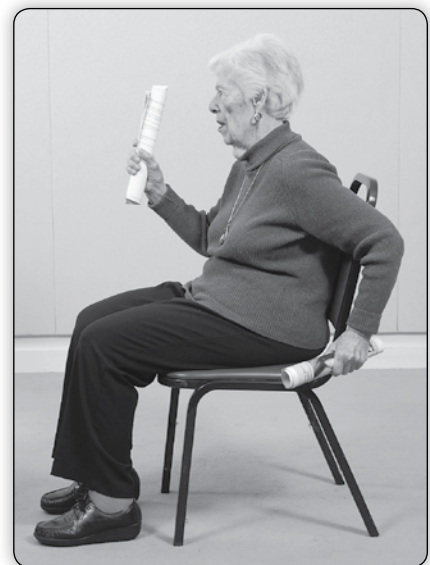
The Start

Give each participant two rolled-up magazines or the light hand weights. Participants should hold one in each hand.

The Moves

Seated Arm Swings

- Participants sit tall and brace their torso: Abs in, ribs lifted, shoulder blades back and down.
- Use the following cues:
 - Bend your elbows to about 90 degrees.
 - Begin to swing your arms.
 - Try to lift your elbows to shoulder height with each swing.
 - Can you feel the lift it gives or the pull across the trunk as each arm rises while the other is back?
 - Can you feel how the added weight assists the motion?
 - Keep going!
 - Is everyone keeping their abs braced? Good.
 - Explain that arm swings are minor perturbations (little balance disturbances), so participants should brace their core muscles. It will help them to keep stable while their arms swing.



Standing With Arm Swings

- ⦿ Now those that can stand without their walkers, should try arm swings standing and walking.
- ⦿ Brace the core muscles to prepare for the big arm swings. (See When Push Comes to Shove on page 107).
- ⦿ Begin arm swings while simply standing with a braced core.
- ⦿ The motion is the same as above, arms are bent and moving forward and back alternately (reciprocally).
- ⦿ Exaggerate the arm swings so a lift is felt across their midsection.

Walking With Arm Swings

- ⦿ When participants feel ready, they start walking. Here are some cues to use.
 - Walk tall with core muscles braced.
 - Choose your own stride and just let your arms swing naturally.
 - Soon you should feel the lift from the swinging arms. Do you?
 - Take bigger steps.
 - Can you notice that the arm swings help increase stride length?
 - Keep walking until you have a sense of how this should feel more naturally.
 - Put away the magazines and walk tall with arm swings.
 - Try longer strides with arm swings.



Keep It Safe »

Cue stable torsos and shoulders over hips frequently; it helps. Let participants determine how much their arms swing and how big of steps to take. The standing and walking variations of this activity are not appropriate for participants with walkers. However, they can still join in with their walkers by walking tall with their ribs lifted and abs braced.

Live It »

Arm swings provide lift and momentum to walking. They can help participants lengthen their strides.